

***The Institution of Engineers, Australia: Monaro Group
Engineering Heritage Committee***

Oral History Program: Biographical Notes

Thomas Edward LEWIS (1928-)
Civil Engineer

Birth & Family: Born 7 June 1928 in Melbourne, Victoria. Father a lawyer. Married Joy ?? (from Cooma) in 1957.

Education: Wesley College, Melbourne

Qualifications: BCE, University of Melbourne, graduating in 1949

Memberships: FIEAust.

Awards:

Work History: Lewis decided at the end of primary school that he wanted to be an engineer. Following graduation from university, he was inspired by a visit from Tom Lang who had come to recruit engineers for the Queensland Irrigation Commission. However, when Lang left the Commission to take up an appointment with the Snowy Scheme as Associate Commissioner, Lewis also decided to apply to join the Scheme.

Lewis arrived at the Snowy Scheme's Sydney office in Alexandria in February 1950 and shortly afterwards was posted to Three Mile Camp as Junior Engineer in the Field Construction Division and later to Mungah and to Tolbar camp where he was in charge. The Field Construction Division was responsible for all day labour civil work on the Snowy. This involved doing the preliminary works in order to expedite completion of a project, before the arrival with their workforces of the contractors who were to build the various tunnels and power stations. It included the construction and on-time completion of tracks, roads, camps and townships built to accommodate the contractors and their workforces.

He was also involved in the construction of airstrips and operated and maintained the air service.

In 1953-54 Lewis went to the US Bureau of Reclamation as part of a in-service training scheme. His three months on various projects beginning at Palisades Dam in Idaho, then dam and power station beside Folsom Prison, Sacramento, California, Denver(?), dam project in Kerwin, Kansas on Mississippi River, and Black Hills of Dakota – a combination of observation and work - gave him confidence and experience in contracting. He commented that Tumut Pond Dam plans were modified, drawing on the design of the dam in Sacramento. His main interest was in earthmoving.

On his return to Australia, Lewis transferred to the Major Contracts Division and was in charge of the planning for the re-siting of the town of Adaminaby.

In 1955-56 he was Engineer in Chief of the Geehi Region and, for a short time, Island Bend. His main task was to upgrade the Dead Horse Gap -Tom Groggin section of Alpine Way from a track to a construction road, and to build a designed road from Tom Groggin to Geehi and out

to Khancoban. He built the camp and township at Geehi, however this project was later abandoned and he was responsible for moving the township to Khancoban. When building Tom Groggin no vehicles were allowed in the area; there was only pedestrian access.

The Snowy Scheme was very conservation conscious – all denuded areas had to be re-vegetated. Great effort was made to get suitable plantings.

Lewis moved to Cooma in 1960 as Assistant Field Construction Engineer, and was promoted to Field Construction Engineer around 1963-64.

In June 1970 the SMA changed to the Snowy Mountains Electricity Commission (SMEC) – set up because the Snowy Scheme was coming to an end. Lewis joined SMEC, was Chief Engineer of Roads and worked extensively overseas, through the Department of Foreign Affairs, on road construction projects in Indonesia, Borneo, Thailand, Pakistan.

He felt privileged to have worked on the Snowy Scheme.

Prepared by Jill Willis, November 2003 from oral history interview conducted by Matthew Higgins on 28.7.2001.